

Congressman Robert Wexler Statement
April 6, 2005
Europe and Emerging Threats Subcommittee
Hearing: Bosnia-Herzegovina: Unfinished Business

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding today's hearing and I look forward to hearing the witnesses.

It has been over nine years since the Dayton Peace Accords were brokered, and although significant change has occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina in terms of political, judicial, economic and social transformation much more needs to be done to stabilize this nation and further the pace of democratic reform.

It is critical that the international mission led by the US, EU and UN carefully examine, lessons learned over the past nine years. At this juncture, despite difficulties and new global obligations, the international community and especially the US must be fully engaged in Bosnia as it take steps to rebuild shattered communities, lessen ethnic violence and nationalism and move further toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

The next several weeks will be particularly critical to this process as UN High Representative Ashdown briefs the EU and NATO on Bosnia's progress towards fulfilling necessary criteria for PFP membership and an EU Task Force determines whether Sarajevo is ready to sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement.

One of the main obstacles impeding Bosnia-Herzegovina's Euro-Atlantic transition has been its obstruction of the Hague Tribunal. In this regard we have witnessed significant progress; Republic of Srpska authorities transferred six war criminals to the Hague over the past year. I am hopeful this effort will continue and lead to the apprehension of all remaining war criminals including Mr. Karadzic and Mladic.

While many refugees and displaced person have returned to their homes and freedom of movement has improved, corruption and organized criminal activity remain rampant in Bosnia. In this regard, I support the decision of Paddy Ashdown to remove Dragan Covic as the Croatian member of the Bosnia presidency due to an indictment on corruption and abuse of office. While this dismissal raises questions about the role of the international mission and the need to transfer greater power to the Bosnian government – it sends a strong signal that corruption is unacceptable and that the rule of law must be observed.

Mr. Chairman, it would be contrary to the President's policy of spreading global democracy if we failed to complete the goals outlined in Dayton. While the possibility of a fractured Bosnia-Herzegovina is less likely, fault lines still remain and it will take a herculean effort on behalf of Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs to ensure that their nation becomes a partner for democracy and tolerance in a "Whole and Free Europe."